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Security Council

Fifty-seventh year

Provisional

4467th meeting

Tuesday, 5 February 2002, 9.30 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Aguilar Zinser	(Mexico)
Members:	Bulgaria	Mr. Tafrov
	Cameroon	Mr. Mbayu
	China	Mr. Wang Yingfan
	Colombia	Mr. Valdivieso
	France	Mr. Levitte
	Guinea	Mr. Fall
	Ireland	Mr. Corr
	Mauritius	Mr. Koonjul
	Norway	Mr. Kolby
	Russian Federation	Mr. Granovsky
	Singapore	
	Syrian Arab Republic	Mr. Wehbe
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Eldon
	United States of America	Mr. Williamson

Agenda

The situation in Burundi.

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02-24214 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 9.35 a.m.

Expression of thanks to the retiring President

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first meeting of the Security Council for the month of February, I should like to take the opportunity to pay tribute, on behalf of the Council, to Mr. Jagdish Koonjul, Permanent Representative of Mauritius to the United Nations, for his service as President of the Council for the month of January 2002. I am sure I speak for all members of the Council in expressing deep appreciation to Ambassador Koonjul for the great diplomatic skill with which he led the work of the Council last month.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Burundi

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I request the Deputy Chief of Protocol to escort Major Pierre Buyoya, President of the Republic of Burundi, to a seat at the Council table.

Major Pierre Buyoya, President of Burundi, was escorted to a seat at the Council table.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the Council, I extend a warm welcome to His Excellency Major Pierre Buyoya, President of the Republic of Burundi.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

I now have the privilege to invite the President of the Republic of Burundi, Major Pierre Buyoya, to make his statement.

President Buyoya (*spoke in French*): May I first of all congratulate you, Sir, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council, and tell you how certain we are that your country, Mexico, will make an important contribution to the Council's mission of ensuring international peace and security.

Similarly, we welcome the dedication and competence with which Mauritius presided over the Council's work during the month of January. We have noted in particular the holding, during its presidency, of the public debate on conflicts in Africa, a situation of concern to the entire community of nations.

May I extend to you, Mr. President, my heartfelt gratitude for making this meeting possible. This is an excellent opportunity that we will utilize to tell the Council about the prevailing political situation in Burundi. By way of reminder — and it is important to emphasize this — we have opted for peace through dialogue due to our conviction that any other way would lead the country to an impasse. Advocating dialogue in an armed conflict is not always easy, but our responsibility gives us no alternative.

Today we can state — and the Burundian people and the world can attest to this — that, despite remaining difficulties, we have chosen the right option, and that we have achieved satisfactory results. We have the moral strength and the political conviction to go forward so as to create conditions for lasting peace in Burundi. In this statement we will inform the Council of the political climate in Burundi and the stages we have passed through in order to take up the challenges we must face.

The political climate in Burundi has improved considerably, especially following the establishment of transitional institutions. On 1 November 2001, an important date in the Burundi peace process, transitional Government was established in accordance with the Arusha Agreement. All parties and political groups signatories to the Peace Agreement are represented in the Government, with the exception of one political group that preferred not to participate.

The political leaders who had been living in exile — some for more than three decades — have returned to Burundi and are carrying out important political duties within the transitional institutions. This augurs well for even greater movement in the days to come, and refugees are already returning by the hundreds every week.

The other transitional institutions, namely, the National Assembly and the Senate, have also been established.

The beginning of the implementation of the Peace Agreement has created a new situation in Burundi. All former political actors now find themselves side by side in the same institutions to implement the Peace

Agreement they negotiated with such difficulty for almost three years at Arusha.

The quarrels regarding the transitional leadership, which caused so much discord among the political class in Burundi, have ended. Reason has now prevailed, and political forces are now playing their role peacefully. The Burundian population is today relieved to see that the peace process has been brought home and is being led from within the country. The voice of the people of Burundi on the ground will now be better heard by the transitional Government and by the Implementation Monitoring Committee for the Peace Agreement, headquartered in Bujumbura. Our common point of reference today is the Arusha Agreement, a compromise platform that broadly takes into account the concerns of all.

The political horizon for the people of Burundi, including the entire political class of our country, is now brighter. Deadlines have been adhered to closely. Eighteen months from 1 November 2001, there will be a transfer of power at the head of State level. Local elections will be organized, to be followed six months later by legislative elections. Then, to conclude the transition after 36 months, a presidential election will be held.

I am convinced that the institutions in place in Burundi have the political means to begin the necessary reforms. The negotiation and signing of a ceasefire is crucial to speeding up and concluding the needed reform process. An enormous task lies ahead, but we can perform it. The proper functioning of institutions is a guarantee of success. Daily experience testifies to the serious-minded commitment of everyone involved; this gives us grounds for optimism.

Although there are indeed reasons for hope, there are real challenges to the peace process which could compromise our progress towards peace if we fail to find satisfactory solutions in the short term. The first challenge is the continued violence. One characteristic of our peace process is that we negotiated without a ceasefire, signed the Arusha Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Burundi without a ceasefire and began the Agreement's implementation while rebel violence continued in our country. That was and is a difficult situation to manage. How can we make the population understand that a peace agreement has been signed when violence continues?

For our part, we have decided never to be an obstacle to peace: in the present situation, the negotiation, signing and implementation of the Arusha Agreement has proved to be the best approach. That is surely why we have enjoyed the understanding of the Security Council and of the rest of the international community, which has been tirelessly pressing the Burundian rebels to join the peace process and negotiate a ceasefire with our Government.

Our heartfelt gratitude goes to you, Mr. President, and to the institution you represent. The Council's constant appeal to the rebels to lay down their weapons and join the other Barundi on the road to peace constitutes valuable support for the people of Burundi. Last May's visit to Burundi by all the members of the Security Council to Burundi was a memorable moment in our relations with the United Nations. It had a very positive impact on political actors in Burundi and throughout the subregion. We would greatly appreciate a further Security Council visit to Burundi to assess and support our peace process.

The violence that the rebels continue to impose on the Burundian people is a challenge not only to us in Burundi but to the Security Council, which bears primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace. We take this opportunity to repeat our request. The Security Council has the means to make the Burundian rebels renounce violence. If diplomatic means do not succeed, all other means should be used to prevent the rebels from taking the peace process hostage. That process is today guided by a Government that is the outcome of negotiations and that enjoys international legitimacy, as the Security Council acknowledged in a recent statement on Burundi. We also call on other countries of our subregion to halt those who seek to destabilize our country.

Burundi is in a good position to understand that a lack of security in a given country has a harmful impact on that country's neighbours. Peace in the Great Lakes region will come when every country of the region lives in peace. Here, both individual and collective efforts are needed.

The second challenge is to rebuild our country. After eight years of crisis, Burundi's economy has suffered greatly. Let me illustrate this poverty with a few statistics. The number of people living below the poverty line has doubled, rising from 35 per cent of the

population in 1992 to more than 60 per cent today. We bear a heavy external debt burden, with contractual debt-service obligations reaching 98 per cent of our exports, with arrears estimated at more than $112 million, and with debts exceeding 180 per cent of gross domestic product, to mention only a few figures.

Here again, we ask the Security Council to raise the international community's awareness of the need to provide substantial support for our peace effort. The people of Burundi hope for a positive impact from the peace process, and are entitled to expect a better life. Our efforts in this sphere recently achieved success at Geneva, where donors pledged more than $800 million over the next three years. We hope the pledges will be redeemed without further delay, because a catastrophic economic situation is, for us as it is elsewhere, a factor for destabilization and, above all, for despair among our people. Additional inputs are required because great sums will be needed for the repatriation of refugees, the resettlement of displaced persons and the rebuilding of damaged infrastructure.

While we in Burundi are concerned with our internal problems, we are following with interest the problems of our subregion, and we are making our modest contribution to anything that could help create a better regional climate. It is crucial to improve bilateral relations with our neighbours, and we are committed to pursuing this process. Our Government is also prepared to play a role in preparations for the regional conference on peace in the Great Lakes region so that it can be held successfully.

I can affirm on behalf of my country that the people, the institutions and the political leaders of Burundi are determined to work more vigorously for peace. We welcome outside contributions, but we know that making peace in Burundi is our own responsibility.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the President of the Republic of Burundi for his important statement and for the kind words he addressed to me.

In accordance with the understanding reached among Council members, it is my intention to adjourn this meeting and to convene a private meeting between members of the Council and the President of the Republic of Burundi.

The meeting rose at 10 a.m.